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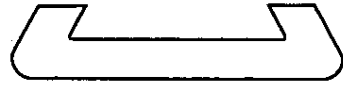


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Central Intelligence Agency



Washington, D.C. 20505

DIRECTORATE OF INTELLIGENCE

8 March 1984

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Vietnam's Options in Kampuchea: Fight, Talk or Both Summary

Dry season military activity in Kampuchea this year has been unusual. Vietnamese forces, which in the two previous dry seasons launched large-scale assaults on resistance bases along the Thai border, have conducted no major military operations. In contrast, Communist Democratic Kampuchean guerrillas--generally most active in the rainy seasons--have launched highly publicized raids on provincial capitals and district seats that have buoyed the spirits of the resistance and its supporters. Although the DK has predictably claimed full credit for Vietnam's failure to mount major dry season attacks, Hanoi's battlefield restraint appears related more to diplomatic efforts to develop a "dialogue" with ASEAN on Kampuchea. We expect Hanoi to continue its emphasis on diplomacy through the end of the current dry season. Although there remains a possibility that Vietnamese forces will attack and overrun one or two resistance bases before the rainy season begins in May, we believe a large campaign along the length of the border is not likely.

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This memorandum was prepared by Southeast Asia Division, Office of East Asian Analysis. Information available as of 28 February was used in its preparation. Comments and queries are welcome and may be directed to Chief, Southeast Asia Division,

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The 1983-84 Dry Season: A Slow Start

A surprisingly low number of Vietnamese military operations have occurred during the November 1983 - May 1984 dry season in Kampuchea compared with the last two dry seasons. Last year, the Vietnamese overran major bases of all three resistance groups in brief, but large-scale attacks between January and early April. The previous year, a large Vietnamese task force carried out a concerted 10-week campaign against Democratic Kampuchea's stronghold at Phnom Melai in addition to overrunning the Khmer People's National Liberation Front base at Sok Sonn. Vietnamese "offensives" are not, however, inevitable in the dry season. Although numerous reports indicated the likelihood of a major offensive in the 1979-1980 dry season, one never materialized; and, in the following year, Vietnamese preoccupation with improving internal security for Kampuchean national elections resulted in only scattered small-scale fighting as troops were pulled from outlying areas to protect major population centers.

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Nevertheless, the relative ease with which Vietnamese forces destroyed major resistance bases in early 1983 suggested they would probably resume large attacks during the current dry season. [redacted] large volumes of supplies, along with armor and artillery, being moved into rear storage areas via Kampuchea's swollen waterways in late 1983 appeared to strengthen prospects for heavy dry season fighting. [redacted]

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Diplomatic Motivations

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Instead, Hanoi has at least temporarily opted for a primarily diplomatic strategy toward Kampuchea that requires a period of military restraint in order to have any prospect for success. Over the past year, Hanoi has consistently emphasized the need for "dialogue" with ASEAN regarding a Kampuchean settlement. During UN General Assembly deliberations last fall on Kampuchean questions, Hanoi proposed that each side refrain from actions that would impair prospects for dialogue. And, for the first time, the Vietnamese chose not to challenge UN seating of Democratic Kampuchea. Although these actions had the obviously self-serving purpose of preventing another diplomatic defeat at the UN, they also fit neatly with Hanoi's current theme of nonconfrontation. [redacted]

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Hanoi has also hosted visits by delegations headed by former Thai Prime Minister Kriangsak, Indonesian Armed Forces commander Murdani, and a group of Indonesian academics and officials. Foreign Minister Nguyen Co Thach will visit Jakarta and Canberra this month, probably making a brief stopover in Bangkok. The communique of the Indochinese Foreign Ministers Conference in late January stressed the desire of Indochinese states for peaceful, cooperative relations with ASEAN, and reiterated past

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calls for dialogue. It also repeated offers to hold talks with individual ASEAN countries or multilaterally between Indochina and ASEAN, giving assurance that the question of PRK participation would be no obstacle. [REDACTED]

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Hanoi has placed particular importance on its contacts with Indonesia, hoping to exploit the accommodationist sentiments in Jakarta toward Vietnam's policies and Indonesia's long-term concerns over Chinese influence in the region. The Vietnamese were quick to exploit Murdani's recent statement during his visit to Hanoi that Vietnam poses no threat to other countries in Southeast Asia. For its part, Jakarta is making efforts to play down Murdani's statements and to emphasize its commitment to ASEAN policy on Kampuchea. [REDACTED]

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The Chinese Factor

A continuing factor in Hanoi's calculations regarding Kampuchea is the prospect of Chinese retaliation for large, provocative attacks, especially any that spill over into Thailand. The Chinese have recently stepped up pressure along the Sino-Vietnamese border in an apparent warning to Hanoi to refrain from such actions. [REDACTED]

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Resistance Activity: The DK Resurfaces

While Vietnamese forces have assumed a low-key posture thus far in the dry season, Communist Democratic Kampuchean guerrillas, in an unusual turnabout, have increased their operations. [REDACTED]

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[REDACTED] Interviews of Khmer refugees by the US Embassy in Bangkok indicated that DK supporters who had been underground since 1979 began to assist the DK's political and logistic operations in the interior. [REDACTED]

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DK forces have sustained their momentum into the current dry season.

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Heavily publicized DK raids were launched at provincial capitals and district seats beginning in mid-January. DK claims of "occupation" have been grossly exaggerated, and in only one case--an attack in late January on the outskirts of Siemreab--have these attacks caused major damage. Nevertheless, the attacks have helped the DK keep Vietnamese forces off balance and dispersed--a major goal of the DK leadership

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The DK has also made some progress toward achieving a second goal: forcing the Vietnamese to pull troops from the border to protect rear areas.

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The success of the DK's dry season initiatives stems in large part from the long, exhaustive efforts it has made to establish supply corridors and caches to support sustained interior operations.

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No Fundamental Change in Hanoi

As in the past, Vietnam's outward flexibility does not reflect any change in its fundamental position. Hanoi remains adamant that the "Chinese threat" posed by DK forces must be ended before its troops can be fully withdrawn from Kampuchea and it has made clear that it will not participate in a settlement under UN auspices. It also has not responded publicly to an ASEAN appeal made last September to begin a troop withdrawal from border areas as a confidence building measure. And Hanoi has continued to threaten military action if no progress is made on the diplomatic front.

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Vietnam can follow this diplomatic strategy with relatively little risk to its military position in Kampuchea:

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- The resistance is still not strong enough to bring about a dramatic shift in the military balance in a single dry season.
- Vietnam's past attacks on resistance bases have aroused international criticism but have done little lasting damage to resistance fighting capabilities.
- Hanoi's massive buildup along the Chinese border since 1979 has increased its confidence that it can contain all but the largest Chinese military reactions to its operations in Kampuchea.

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Outlook: Continuing the "Fight, Talk" Strategy

It is extremely difficult to predict Hanoi's intentions because our information on Vietnamese policy decisions is often limited.

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Moreover, Hanoi probably is continuously reevaluating the proper balance between military and diplomatic actions. In any case, Hanoi has three basic options through the end of the dry season:

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- It can emphasize diplomacy and contain its military activity to sporadic shelling of resistance bases, reconnaissance missions, and frequent troop movements in an attempt to force the resistance to focus on defending its bases rather than dispatching additional guerrillas into the interior. So long as Hanoi believes its diplomatic activity is making progress and its military superiority is not threatened, we believe this to be the most likely option.
- Hanoi can continue its diplomatic activity but increase the level of military operations to include attacking and overrunning one or two non-Communist bases (such as Ta Tum or Ban Sa Ngae) or DK bases other than the stronghold at Phnom Melai, or attacking DK units in the interior. This is a strong possibility if Hanoi believes it must counter the publicity attending the DK attacks and that received by Sihanouk on his swing through Southeast Asia. Hanoi may also want to blunt the resistance's momentum heading into the rainy season. If Hanoi chooses this option, its forces can launch attacks with little or no warning.
- Hanoi's least likely option is a major campaign along the length of the border that would involve multiple, simultaneous attacks against resistance bases; a single campaign that eliminated three or more large bases; or a concerted assault against a heavily defended DK base such

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as Phnom Melai. This would require major reinforcements
that would be difficult to accomplish in the time
remaining in the dry season. [REDACTED]

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